

City of Savannah, Georgia
19th-Century Landscape Elements in the Squares
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Squares of Savannah

The following information and research is about the landscape elements in the squares of Savannah, including plantings, railings, seating, and paths/walks. The scope of the research began in 1819 with evidence of budget allocation for care of these squares, through to 1898 with ordinances being passed to protect the work that had been done throughout the years. This research showed how the importance of the squares evolved over time, as well as the use of the squares.

1819-1824 (Annual Settlements, 5600-CT-400, volume 1):

Payments from the city to laborers for the enclosure of various squares, repairs, and the planting of trees are seen in the Annual Settlements.

1853 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Scavengers Department was reorganized and was the system for keeping the streets, squares, and lanes in order, under contract for a period of 3 years at a cost to the city of \$25,000.

1855-1866 (Annual Reports of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Treasurer's annual reports first indicate allocation for 'work and materials on streets, lanes, and squares.'

1858 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

"The Streets and Lanes" indicate the sidewalks in Monterey Square had been paved, which improved the appearance of the squares overall. City Treasurers report indicates more budget allocation for the care of the squares

1860 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

"Internal Improvements" indicate allocation for "Paving Walks of Squares" for a cost of \$1,924.67. Additionally, there was allocation for enclosing Wright Square with granite posts, iron railings, gradings, etc. There was also an allocation for paid labor, repairs, lumber, cedar posts, and keeping squares in order, as well as the planting of trees. Budget was given for rebuilding the wooden fences around all the public squares, railings inside of Johnson and Monterey Squares, paving with bricks in Wright, Chippewa, St. James (later renamed Telfair), Madison, and Orleans Square, enlarging, grading, and general improvements.

1862-1863 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

“Streets and Lanes” indicated allocation for “keeper of the squares” within the municipal reports.

1866 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

“Streets and Lanes” allocation indicated for repairs and paintings of the railings around the squares and monuments on Bull Street. Allocations also indicated for repairing and painting railings around different squares, and new benches to be added.

1868 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

First indication of a separate section for ‘squares’ in the municipal reports. “Four of the public squares have been newly enclosed during the year. Pulaski, Columbia, Warren, and Liberty. These squares, as well as those completed in 1867, have been built with heavy cedar posts of superior quality, obtained in Florida. The remaining open squares should be improved in a like manner.”

1869 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

The “Trees” section in the municipal reports indicate about 350 trees having been planted in and around the park extension and squares, as well as indicates white washing of the trees, and boxes being placed around them.

1870 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

“Parks and Squares” section in municipal reports indicates that “Chippewa and Lafayette squares have been spaded over and graded, and sown with grass seed and clover. Chippewa has been laid out with walks diverging in curved lines, from the central walks along the line of Bull street towards the trust lots on the east and west sides of the square. By this arrangement the unsightly diagonal paths across the grass-plats, made in endeavoring to reach by the shortest route the points designated are avoided. The new walks have been shelled and enclosed with cedar posts, supporting a single continuous rail formed of gas-pipe, designated half-inch. A heavier rail would be more appropriate; the size used being too easily bent. All the remaining squares throughout the city not having paved walks have been laid out with walks intersecting at right angles and shelled. Some time will be needed to properly shape and render smooth the surface. The services of not less than three men will be constantly required to keep in proper order the public squares. With this number of competent men they may be made to add greatly to the beauty and attractiveness of our city. About 550 trees were been planted in the squares and streets by the city, irrespective of those by individuals. The Central railroad, as usual, have kindly furnished transportation for those varieties not found in our vicinity.

1871 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

The interior railings in Chippewa Square have been replaced by others of the same description, and of sufficient strength to prevent their being bent.

1877 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

“Parks and Squares” indicates that Chatham Square has been regraded, the surface being raised nearly one foot over the whole area, and macadamized walks with brick curb laid down.

1879 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

The railings of the squares along the line of Bull Street had been repainted. The decayed wooden curb to the walks in Pulaski Square had been removed and replaced with brick. The grade has been raised and the walks re-shelled, and the depressed portions of the square filled up and graded.

1880 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

A street and lane committee was created through City Council which would be responsible for the care of parks and squares.

1884 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

There was indication that ordinances were passed that prohibit the use of velocipedes upon any sidewalks, squares, or parks of the City of Savannah.

1885 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Two walks were laid in Monterey square of Baltimore paving brick, as well as a new walk in Madison Square made of Macon brick. A new walk was re-laid in Madison Square and two were laid in Chippewa Square. There was a new walk put in Wright Square, and one re-laid as well. New benches were placed in Whitfield square

1887 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

A new walk was laid in Lafayette Square, as well as two new brick walks in Chatham Square. Two new walks were laid in each of the following squares: Oglethorpe, Wright, and Madison. New curbing in Troup square was added, and the square was regarded.

1888 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

The walks in Chippewa Square paved with macon brick, as well as two walks laid in Orleans Square. The walks in Elbert Square were paved with savannah pressed brick. Iron railings in Johnson Square were removed, and granite curbing placed instead. Two railings were placed in Chippewa square, as well as four benches placed in Chatham Square. There were also trees planted in many of the squares.

1889 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Railings built around the squares have been removed with stone curb replaced instead. Old trees were removed and substituted with new ones. Columbia Square

was graded, and three walks of gas house lime, and one of a preparation of coal tar and lime, were laid through it. Franklin Square was graded, and four walks of oyster shells, covered with a preparation of coal tar and lime, laid through the said square. Green Square has been graded and sodded, and four walks of oyster shells, with a surface coat of coal tar and lime, laid through same. Washington Square has been graded, and four walks of oyster shells, with a top surface of "gas house lime," were laid through same square. Through Oglethorpe Square, two walks of oyster shells, with a top surface of " gas house lime," have been laid. In Madison and Johnson Squares, and in Telfair Place, 2-inch galvanized water pipe were laid for the purpose of watering the grass and trees. Chippewa, Johnson, and Wright Squares were graded, and top-dressed with fertilizers. The wooden railings around Madison Square and Telfair Place were removed, and a granite curbing substituted in their places. These squares were graded, fertilized and spaded, and oats and grass seed sown in them. Monterey Square was graded, fertilized and spaded, and sown with grass and oats. The railings around all the squares had been repaired, the walks kept clean, and, during the summer months, the grass mown (two mowing machines were purchased for this purpose).

1890 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

The wooden railings were removed and a granite curbing substituted in its place around the following squares: Monterey, Chippewa, Lafayette, Pulaski, Orleans, Chatham, Elbert, Warren, Oglethorpe, Calhoun, Whitefield, Troup, Columbia, Reynolds, Green, Liberty, Franklin, Washington and Crawford. The sweepings from Broughton and Liberty streets had fertilized these squares. Four walks were laid in Crawford, Troup, Warren, and Liberty Squares. Two walks were laid in Lafayette Square. These walks, with the exception of one in Warren square, (made of cement), were composed of cinders and refuse lime from the gas works. Two hundred trees were planted in various squares in the city, and the " tree boxes" covered with wire instead of slats.

1891 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Parks and squares were officially delegated under care of streets and lanes committee within City Council. Fifty-three palmetto trees were planted; thirteen in the Park, four around the Confederate Monument and six each in the following squares, to-wit: Johnson, Wright, Chippewa, Madison, Monterey and Telfair.

1892 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

More walks were laid in Chatham Square.

1893-1894 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

There were the first mentions seen of plantings being seen in municipal reports, including mowing and planting flowers.

1895 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Annual Municipal Reports stated that “it has been deemed necessary...to create a Park and Tree Commission, the sole duty of which will be the care...of our parks, squares, and grass plats.”

1896 (Annual Report of the Mayor of the City of Savannah):

Report of the Park and Tree Commissioners states that Sec. 6 of an Act of Legislature in the State of Georgia in 1895 created and organized a Park and tree Commission for the City of Savannah. It was stated that no permanent improvement of a square could be made until the walks are properly graded and curbed. During the year, all squares were plowed and planted with Bermuda grass. Carpet bedding was introduced around the monuments in the Bull Street squares to add materially to their appearance. This called attention to squares in need of improvement (which were located on the southern portion of city)

January 27, 1896: (Minutes of the Park and Tree Commission, 5600PC-010, pgs. 15, 18, 19)

A list of the parks and squares was motioned to be created by the Clerk of Council. A list of squares was created, noting their area and their boundaries spanning from North-south and east-west.

Plans drawn up by Mr. A.L Oelschig relative to adornment of the squares were submitted to the commission. It was suggested that the citizens of Savannah submitted proposals and donations for the new plans in the squares. This was seen as unsuccessful, and the plans of Oelschig were adopted by contract.

The issue of proper seating in the squares was examined by the commission as well, and it was determined that iron benches were the most suitable for use.

February 10, 1896: (Minutes of the Park and Tree Commission, 5600PC-010, pgs. 23, 25, and 26)

It was resolved as well that grass should be laid in all the squares by the end of the year. Bermuda grass was determined from an outside source to be the best suited to the climate of the south. Cow manure was seen to be the best fertilizer as well.

March 9, 1896: (Minutes of the Park and Tree Commission, 5600PC-010, pg. 34)

The remaining railings were petitioned to be removed from around the squares.

October, 1896: (Minutes of the Park and Tree Commission, 5600PC-010, pg. 53)

The commission throughout this year outlined seasonal plantings as well, and there was a lot of focus in decorating the Bull Street squares.

November 9, 1897: (Minutes of the Park and Tree Commission, 5600PC-010, pgs. 135, 137)

It was petitioned by the commission to pave the walks in all city squares left unpaved, using such material and laying the pavement in such manner as the park and tree commission may direct. The commission requested that proposals of railroad tracks to be laid through the squares went to them first for approval.

May 9, 1898: (Minutes of the Park and Tree Commission, 5600PC-010, pg. 135, 166)

A set of rules was laid out by the commission for the use of the squares in an attempt to protect the work that had been completed. These rules included no private tree plantings or plantings in the grass flats, no injury to the plantings, no railings or fences to be privately built, no trespassing, no animals, no bicycles or handcarts, no cars or other automobiles, and other such rules.

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